



Montgomery County Council

From the Office of Councilmember Nancy Floreen

For Immediate Release

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Agricultural Reserve Alive and Well – We Must Keep it Safe – No Techway Through It

“Agriculture is thriving in Montgomery County”, stated Councilmember Nancy Floreen as she introduced a Council Resolution to reaffirm Council’s support for the Agricultural Reserve and oppose any Techway through it. “I think many people will be surprised by some of the numbers, but I am proud to say that there are currently 577 working farms in this County. And 117 square miles of County land are in agricultural use. According to the Daily Record, the County reaps \$350 million a year in economic impact because of our farms.

“As reported in the press recently, the Census of Agriculture’s report indicated that the inventory of County farmland has decreased from 124 square miles in 1997 to 117 square miles in 2002. For me, this data is a reminder that protection of the Reserve requires constant vigilance. That is why I, along with my colleagues, Steve Silverman and Michael Knapp, introduced this Resolution - to reaffirm the need to protect our Agricultural Reserve, but also to remind our residents of how much we have protected.

“Montgomery County was named the best jurisdiction in the nation by the Daily Record for preserving farmland and other open space. More than 93,000 acres of the County’s 316,800 acres are still in agriculture or open space, accounting for 29.18% of County land, and most of that is in the Ag Reserve. And most important, 60,000 acres are already in perpetual easement.

“We didn’t get here by accident. We’re a green County thanks to forward-looking policies like our transfer of development rights program, (which allows farmers to sell development rights to builders for use in urban and suburban areas in exchange for the farmers pledge to keep their agricultural land

undeveloped.) The TDR program accounts for over 43,000 acres of our preserved land so far.

“We also are spending \$13.5 million over the next six years to purchase easements that preserve farmland for agriculture. We currently have 55 properties, totaling 6700 acres, preserved through this easement program. And we’re preserving some 3400 acres via our County Rural Legacy Program. All this is on top of the 4,900 acres we’re preserving by participating in State agricultural preservation programs.

“There is simply no way we would jeopardize this precious natural resource by constructing a highway through its heart. Which is why my resolution also affirms Council opposition to any Techway that would drive a wedge through our Reserve.”

Councilmember Mike Knapp stated, “The agriculture industry is deeply rooted in Montgomery County’s heritage. I fully support the Agricultural Reserve as an asset and resource for all of our residents and I intend to continue to work with my colleagues to ensure it is there for generations to come.”

“This resolution reaffirms the actions of prior County Councils,” said Council President Steve Silverman, a co-sponsor of the Resolution. “No Techway through our Agricultural Reserve, no second Potomac River crossing in Montgomery County, and strong support for agriculture in our Agricultural Reserve.”

Councilmember Floreen concluded, “We are keenly aware of the need to relieve the paralyzing congestion on our roads and highways. A second Potomac River crossing may be necessary to help lighten the load. And the Frederick County Commissioners want it to connect at Point of Rocks. That’s fine. But we totally reject the notion of paving a Techway through our Agricultural area. We treasure this farmland and worked too hard to preserve it to allow a Techway there.”

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COUNTY COUNCIL
FOR MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND

By: Councilmember Nancy Floreen, Council President Steve Silverman, and
Councilmember Michael Knapp

Subject: Council Affirms Need to Protect County's Farmland and Formally
Opposes a Techway Through the Agricultural Reserve

Background

1. In October 1980, the County Council adopted a functional Master Plan – the Preservation of Agricultural and Open Space. The Plan focused on preserving farmland and establishing a policy framework to enable the continuation of agriculture in the County.
2. Montgomery County has been nationally recognized for its commitment to designating 110,000 acres as Agricultural Reserve and 26,000 acres as Rural Open Space and for the progressive program to accomplish this which includes: creation of the Rural Density Transfer Zone (RDT) allowing only 1 home for every 25 acres; the Transfer Development Rights program allowing property owners to sell development rights to their land, realize equity from their farm, and keep the land as agricultural in perpetuity; the Montgomery County Agricultural Easement Program, and large purchases of parkland and open space in the RDT by M-NCPPC.
3. On June 3, 2004, the Census of Agriculture released data indicating that the inventory of farmland has decreased from 166 square miles in 1984, to 124 square miles in 1997, to 117 square miles in 2002. This information is a reminder that protection of the Reserve requires constant vigilance.
4. However, in August, 2003, even with our population nearing 1 million people, Montgomery County was named the best jurisdiction in the nation by the Daily Record for preserving farmland and other open space. More than 93,000 acres of the County's 316,800 acres are still in agriculture or open space, accounting for 29.18% of County land. Most important, 60,000 acres are already in perpetual easement.
5. In spite of the decrease in farm acreage, agriculture is thriving in Montgomery County. This industry continues to show its strength with

annual sales of County agricultural products growing by 30% from 1997 to 2002, and the number of full-time farm operators since 1997 increasing by almost 20%. There are currently 577 working farms, with the average size at 130 acres. Agriculture, horticulture, equine, and related industries accounted for \$350 million in economic impact this year.

6. Since the General Plan was first passed in 1964 denoting the “Corridors and Wedges” concept, this County has taken our rural heritage seriously by continuously committing to preserving our farmland and open space. This commitment should be reaffirmed regularly.
7. Interest in constructing an additional bridge across the Potomac River is growing. A river crossing connecting to a highway traversing the Agricultural Reserve would threaten everything the County has created.
8. The Frederick County Commission has publicly expressed support for a Potomac Crossing from Virginia connecting to Maryland at Point of Rocks in Frederick County. Past Montgomery County Councils have indicated support for that proposal.

Action

The County Council for Montgomery County, Maryland approves the following resolution:

The Council is committed to the preservation of our County farms and Agricultural Reserve. The Council opposes a study of or proposal for a Potomac River crossing and highway that would traverse our Agricultural Reserve.

This is a correct copy of Council action.

Mary A. Edgar, CMC
Clerk of the Council